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## **I-15 expansion to begin next year**

Sam Scorup - Daily Herald

Orem City Council members and Utah Department of Transportation officials met Tuesday in Orem to discuss plans to expand the Utah County I-15 corridor.

The I-15 corridor expansion project, known as I-15 CORE, will stretch from south Payson to 123rd South in Salt Lake City. Its primary purpose is to decrease traffic congestion on I-15, said Dal Hawks, project manager for I-15 CORE.

In a recent poll of Utah County residents, 55 percent of respondents listed congestion as one of their top concerns with respect to traffic and driving, according to Hawks. An additional 31 percent of those polled said congestion was among their mid-priority traffic concerns. Additionally, 94 percent of respondents said they have noticed an increase in traffic in recent years, Hawks said. Only 5 percent noticed no difference.

"And I don't know what the 5 percent are seeing," Hawks said.

The first part of the construction project will be the American Fork Main Street Interchange with the Pioneer Crossing Project. Construction in this area is scheduled to begin in the spring of 2009, Hawks said. From then until the winter of 2011, the large part of the project will be designed. Overlapping with this time period will be the construction of the major areas of the project, scheduled to take place from spring 2010 through the fall of 2014, Hawks said.

Starting this fall and continuing through the fall of 2009, there will be a period of development and land purchase, Hawks said.

I-15 CORE's approved budget is set for \$2.6 billion. General state funds will be used to cover the costs of design, construction, utilities, management and right of way, Hawks said.

Goals for I-15 CORE include staying within budget, getting high value for the given budget, minimizing inconvenience to the public, completing the project by the fall of 2014 and upholding the public trust.

The Environmental Impact Statement for the project was signed and approved by the Federal Highway Administration on Aug. 15, according to the state government's Web site. Issues discussed in the EIS included the project's impact on wetlands and noise mitigation, said Merrell Jolley, project engineer for I-15 Core.